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By
Edwin A Morrison,
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On The Diseases of The Liver.

The liver is evidently the largest gland in the human body, and, since nature throughout her works has seldom been accused of supererogation, we may safely conclude that the importance of its function over the animal oeconomy, is commensurate with its magnitude.

From this consideration, together with the variety and delicacy of its structure, we cannot be surprised to find it on so many occasions the seat of extensive & dangerous diseases.

I shall confine my observations to that form of disease, to which it is most liable, and which has been denominated by Nosologists Hepatitis.

Of this disease there has generally been made two varieties, the acute and chronic, the pathognomonic symptoms of each I shall presently enumerate:

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But before doing so, it will be necessary perhaps to say a few words relative to their

Causes.

They appear to be all those producing other inflammations, such as the application of cold, external injuries from contusions, blows &c.; certain passions of the mind, violent exercise, intense summer heat, sudden vicissitudes from heat to cold, long continued intermittent and remittent fevers, and various solid concretions in the substance of the Liver.

Out of the above causes, I am inclined to believe, that we shall find violent exercise, intense summer heat, and sudden vicissitudes from heat to cold, to bear a greater proportion in the production of the disease, than the whole of the others combined. The manner in which the latter operates, we have, I think, satisfactorily explained by the elastic and ingenious Doctor James Johnson, in his work on Tropical climates.

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speaking of hurried biliary secretions and perspiration, he says, "The effects resulting from the application of cold, under these circumstances, will be in all degrees from a slight shiver to a fever, and even instant death. We will suppose, then, only in a slight degree, during the temporary torpor of the extreme vessels on the surface, and of the vena portarum, the pori biliarii and excretory ducts, will partake of the same atony, and the bile will stagnate till the reaction succeeds and propels it forward in its accustomed course, with a degree of acceleration proportioned to the quiescence. It is plain, that by frequent repetitions of this, the vessels and ducts in question, will lose tone; and, as atony is the parent of spasm contraction of the ducts must at these times take place; the bile will become viscid, occasionally from stagnation, and be with more difficulty brought forward into the intestines, during the subsequent increased action of the vessels. This obstruction will form an action constantly impending

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till time, or some accidental aggravation of the causes above mentioned, kindles up Hepatitis, which runs rapidly into suppuration, and perhaps in a few days destroys both the organ and life of the patient, unless it be "skillfully checked in its career."

Whether Hepatic diseases are more prevalent now, than formerly, or whether they are better understood I shall not undertake to determine; though from what I can learn from those who have had an ample opportunity of deciding, I am induced to believe, that they are both. That we have more cases of intermittent and remittent bilious fevers than formerly, I presume will not be denied, which being the case it must follow as a natural consequence that we have more Hepatic diseases, as they have always been considered as a fruitful source of such diseases. I now come to the more immediate consideration of the subject, and shall treat first of that form of the disease called

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Acute Hepatitis.

This belongs to the class Pyrexiæ and order Phlegmasiæ of Doctor Cullen. It generally commences with rigors or shiverings, followed by a pungent pain of the right side, which is felt also under the margin of the ribs, shooting more particularly in the direction of the back, and to the shoulder blade; cough, oppression in the respiration, nausea, sickness, often with a vomiting, of apparently bilious matter accompanied with considerable fever, great watchfulness and occasional delirium, extreme thirst, the tongue generally covered with a white crust, extending also to the mouth and fauces; dejection of spirits, sometimes hiccup, loss of appetite and difficulty of lying except on the affected side; yet instances now and then occur, where the patient is unable to lie on either side; pressure on the region of the liver, where there is usually some tension, induces considerable increase of pain and tendency to cough, and the cough of the disease is more generally dry than otherwise; the bowels are frequently irregular,

though oftner slow than the reverse; the urine secreted in small quantities, is often a high colour, and often with bile; the pulse is hard and strong, sometimes exceeding one hundred and twenty in a minute, and, at times intermitting; it is attended occasionally with a jaundiced colour of the skin, arising from the bile not getting readily into the common duct, by reason of the pressure of the inflamed liver on the ductus biliarii; while the continuance of inflammation occasionally induces as the resulting consequence, adhesions of the organ to the contiguous parts or considerable engorgements of particular portions, such as the lobes where suppuration ensues, or sometimes scirrosity.
Both ancient and modern nosologists, have made a distinction between the symptoms that occurs when the inflammation occupies the convex surface of the liver, and those that are present when the disease affects the concave. It is said, when difficulty of breathing and cough accompanies the pain in the region of the

liver; that these symptoms denote the inflammation to be seated on the superior convex part; but where the inflammation occupies the concave or inferior, which lies contiguous to the stomach and duodenum, there is more sickness and vomiting; and, moreover, the pain is not so violent in the region of the organ as in the other instance.
The Treatment of this disease consists in the general means of subduing inflammation, with a strict and regid observance of the antiphlogistic regimen.
Bloodletting, "plena vivo" should be brought into immediate requisition and the quantity drawn be proportionate to the violence of pain and pyrexia present, and repeated very soon again if the symptoms run high. After this, we should resort to topical bleeding by cups or leeches. If the symptoms do not abate in consequence of these means, and vascular action be sufficiently reduced, a large blister should be applied immediately over the region of the liver, and kept open by suitable dressings or reapplied if

necessary; cooling cathartics should be early and freely resorted to as the most effectual means of promoting the distention of the liver, and clearing of its accumulated and vitiated secretion, which is a matter of the utmost importance and should command our most serious attention. When these means have preceded, milder ones may be resorted to, calculated to regulate the secretions of the bowels and skin.

A close attention to, and an adoption of these measures for a few weeks, will generally restore the patient to his pristine health. When, however, after this length of time, a few of the milder symptoms remain, we may consider it as belonging to the chronic form of the disease and treat it accordingly.

Chronic Hepatitis

This form of the disease is met with much more frequently in this country, than the acute species, and arises from the same variety of causes, together with its being often

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a consequence of it. The symptoms of this disease, often present themselves with such "protean variety," and are so insidious in their march, that the patient often finds the very fabric of his constitution sapped, before he becomes aware of its existence.

They commence with a sense of fulness or stuffing after meals, at times ~~at times~~ accompanied with a painful sense of oppression and tiredness of the whole epigastric region, with a disposition to drowsiness occasionally accompanied with flatulence; tinitus aurium, and sometimes a sensation of fluttering or distressing feeling of vacuity at the pit of the stomach; and, at other times, on the most trifling exertion, the patient feels considerable lassitude and languor followed by a tendency to sleep: This sleep however, is seldom refreshing but is interrupted by distressing dreams; slight pain is occasionally felt on either side, but it chiefly fixes itself on the left; to this may be added, that when in bed, the patient can only lie tolerably

comfortable by confining himself to one side. The mind often feels ill at ease, becomes capricious and is fretful and irritable, from the slightest cause; in some cases there is a considerable defect of memory, a want of usual distinctness of ideas, so that the patient labours under the greatest difficulty of explaining his sensations accurately; and a general incapacity for mental exertions prevails. The stomach sympathizes in this state and feels occasionally disturbed; the pulse is here seldom accelerated but is more generally depressed, a dry and harsh skin, without much increase of heat, is often a leading feature, but in some individuals sudden perspiration burst forth from the slightest exertion. The bowels never perform their operation in a corresponding proportion to the quantity of aliment taken in: the appetite, however, undergoes commonly no diminution; on the contrary, it is frequently increased to a preternatural degree, yet on some occasions it is diminished, as in those cases generally, where the system materially suffers.

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The countenance is generally pale and sallow; often a peculiar dulness of the eyes is observable. The tongue is generally found furred, more particularly at its base, the mouth clammy and the taste vitiated, the urine variable, being influenced by many circumstances; In this state of the disease the sleep is often disturbed with frightful dreams, and alarming imaginations: in some instances, there is an obtuse pain of the right side, extending to the top of the Shoulder, where a gnawing or aching sensation is experienced, with a fulness on the side, and about the pit of the stomach, keeping up constant uneasiness. There are often also severe cramps or spasms experienced and nervous twitchings of the muscles and tendinous parts, with aching pains of the limbs, occasionally wanting the usual freedom of motion in some of the joints.
Where the disease has continued for a considerable length of time, an emaciation of the face is obvious, and in some instances likewise of the body; and the general

aspect of the patient is extremely unhealthy; the secretions of the bowels exhibit an unnatural colour and odour, are adhesive, of a dark mouldy, and often, a clayey appearance, and are generally voided with difficulty, much straining and discharge of flatus, being often deficient in quantity, so that the secretions are often unsatisfactory, and attended with a sense of load & irritation about the rectum; but the whole of these symptoms when moderate will continue for a length of time before they command much attention from the patient, believing that there is but little the matter with himself. Even Hepatic abscesses, have discovered on dissection, which had given no inconvenience during life, nor were suspected to exist, though such abscesses must have been the consequence of previous and progressive inflammation.

After mentioning the above Symptoms, generally laid down by authors, I cannot refrain from expressing it as my humble opinion, that this disease has

often been overlooked in the investigation and treatment of those obstinate cases of Amenorrhœa, which has heretofore proved so intractable. To this opinion I am led, not from speculative or theoretical views, but from what has come under my immediate observation; (My Preceptor having had several cases of this kind during the last Summer.) Were it necessary however, I think it would not be difficult to show that the uterus may as readily become affected by sympathy, as the stomach, or any other part of the body. Since it is acknowledged to exercise so powerful an influence over the system, and which induced Van Helmont to believe that it "imprinted the peculiar and distinctive characteristic of the sex"

"Propter solum uterum mulier est id quod est."

That Amenorrhœa may as often prove a cause of Hepatitis, is I think equally evident; which should induce us to consider them reciprocally under the relation of cause and effect.

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The cases to which I have alluded, had obstinately resisted every course of treatment, heretofore laid down, but, immediately on directing the remedies to the liver, and treating the disease solely as an affection of that viscus, they began to yield and exceeded, in the rapidity of their recovery, our most sanguine expectations.
One of the cases, had been upwards of two years standing, which yielded to this treatment in a few months.
I now come to the treatment. But, before entering into it, I shall enquire whether the practice that was successful ten years since in this section of the country, is equally happy at the present period. In doing so, I must consult those who have had better opportunities of deciding. "That the same practice," says an old and experienced practitioner, "which was eminently successful in their treatment eight years ago, is not so much so now. I believe well generally be admitted by the faculty, in this part of the union. Formerly, they readily yielded to the mercurial action, but it is not so

now, at least in my circle, and in that of some of my friends."

This, I believe, will be found consonant with the experience of most of the practitioners of this part of the country. At least, it is so with all whom I have consulted, and I have been at no little pains to procure information on the subject.

Finding this to be the case, we were compelled to resort to other measures, that might prove effectual, and happily for mankind we have found this in a much less dangerous remedy than Mercury. I mean cathartics, which by emulging the biliary vessels and cleansing the bowels of that load of fæcal and other matter, with which they are oppressed, promotes a healthy secretion of bile, instead, of having its elements floating in the circulation. This natural stimulus promotes chylification; which strengthening the whole material fabric communicates energy to the mind, till at length the bloom of health once more revisits the sallow cheek

of despondency. In the management of this disease by cathartics, the biliary secretion is to the Physician, what the compass is to the mariner. He should regard them as the most unerring criterion, and almost as his only guide. So long as they assume a vitiated appearance, we should continue the cathartics: we should not stop them until the liver is enlivened, and secretion ~~[illegible]~~ in such a way as to show some steadiness of principle, for they will assume for a few days a natural aspect, and in a short time become as vitiated as ever. "As soon as we have obtained this end, we should proceed with delicate caution, not to prostrate or annoy the organ too much; as now, we must in a measure rest on our oars, having gained our desired object; for an excess of stimulus, at this time, would defeat our endeavours."

But, while our attention is directed to the invigorating of the Liver, and giving full action to the Stomach and bowels, by which the function of the liver will be

materially influenced; We should not overlook the restoration of that balance, which equally belongs to the surface and general circulation, to attain which, in some instances of congestive plenitude of this organ, it will be found necessary likewise to deplenish the vessels by abstraction of blood from the arm, or by cupping over the surface.

These means, steadily persisted in, and assisted by a well regulated diet and regimen, with the wearing of flannel next to the skin will be found generally, to restore the patient in a few months, while others, from a variety of causes, will require a much longer time. While I have considered mercury in this stage of the disease as ineffectual, I am nevertheless convinced of its superiority in that more advanced stage of the disease, or that depending on structural alteration. Here it is evident, that the most active and energetic means are requisite to check the progress of such an alarming evil. It must therefore be introduced into the system in the mildest

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